

"Old Hickory" Style - New Orleans Prepares for Battle

By Toni Lee Robinson

Andrew Jackson was a strong-minded man. He had resolved that the area from Florida to Mexico would belong to the United States. The Creek Nation had once held a big part of the territory. Now the tribe was no longer a factor. Jackson had seen to that. Florida, he was sure, could be wrested from the Spanish. Above all, Jackson was determined that the area wouldn't fall into British hands. His hatred of this old enemy fueled his resolve.

Admiral Cochrane, commander of the British fleet, saw the region as a plum ripe for the picking. This important U.S. port of New Orleans had been bottled up by the British blockade. Its warehouses were stuffed with cotton, tobacco, sugar, and all manner of costly goods. If the city were taken, its booty would bring a large share of profit for the Admiral. In addition, of course, the loss of the city could be the death blow for the upstart American nation.

In 1814, British pressure in the area increased. England's war with France had ended. The Admiral got his way. At Cochrane's urging, troops and resources were promptly sent to America. Cochrane had used alliances with Spain to make inroads into the southern territory. His actions brought him face to face with "Old Hickory."

The two powerful men had clashed at Mobile and Pensacola. Jackson's forces had repelled the British thrusts. Now it was rumored that Britain was gathering a huge force in the West Indies. The troops, it was said, were gearing up for a specific mission. They planned an all out assault on the prize of the Gulf, the city of New Orleans.

General Jackson sent for every able-bodied man in the territory. He called up militia. He rallied the volunteers that had served him well in the Creek Wars. He enlisted the help of his friend John Coffee. Coffee brought his force of 2,800 mounted Tennessee riflemen.

Jackson found help in some unlikely quarters. The Free Men of Colour, a battalion of former slaves, joined the effort. The pirate Jean Lafitte brought his men to Jackson's aid. There were even some Native American fighters in the mix. In all, Jackson managed to gather about 5,000 men. The British force was reported to be upwards of 12,000 seasoned soldiers.

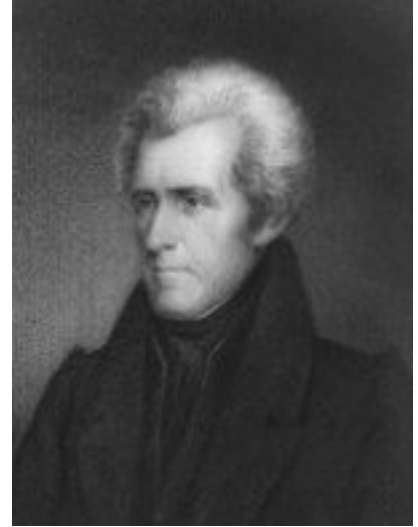
Jackson hurried to set up defenses for New Orleans. Thousands of musket balls were ordered. The General had logs felled across the openings of bayous leading to the city. Nearby Lake Borgne, opening to the Gulf, was fortified with five gunboats. This proved to be too little. When the British fleet sailed in, the lake and Jackson's boats were taken. Jackson now had no "eyes" on the lake to report on British movements.

Old Hickory was frustrated. He was in the dark about enemy activities. Besides that, he was unsure how the people of the city would react to the British attack. There were many Spanish and other "non-Americans" living there. Would they try to hand the city over to the enemy? He solved the problem in "Old Hickory" fashion. He put New Orleans under martial law.

Then Jackson learned that the British had pushed through a poorly built barricade at Bayou Bienvenue. They now occupied a plantation about eight miles from the city. It would be an ideal staging area for enemy troops. Frustration turned to fury. "I will smash them, so help me God!" Jackson vowed.

Jackson launched a surprise attack. On the night of December 23, 1814, he led 2,000 men to the British camp. Like a bolt from the blue, Jackson struck the enemy. The British were caught off guard. The enemy rallied and fought off the attack. But Jackson had gained an enormous benefit.

Reports from British spies had made U.S. forces appear weak and unprepared. Jackson's lightning strike upset that picture. No weak, undermanned leader would have tried the bold attack, the British commander reasoned. General



Name _____



Date _____

Pakenham decided that he would wait for more troops. The British delayed their assault. This gave Jackson time to solidify his defenses.

Just three miles from the British camp, Jackson dug in. He chose the spot carefully. He had a mud wall built on a narrow strip of land outside the city. The breastwork was over half a mile long. On one side was the Mississippi River. On the other side lay a formidable cypress swamp. Jackson directed that the wall be thick enough to stop the British cannon balls. Cotton bales provided cover and more stopping power. Now Old Hickory and his hodgepodge army were ready for a fight.

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Questions

1. Explain Andrew Jackson's view of territorial claims in the area from Mexico to Florida.

2. What were Admiral Cochrane's plans for the Gulf region? What inspired these ideas?

- _____ 3. _____ resulted in more British pressure on U.S. defenses in the southern arena.

- A. Jackson's desire to take the territory
- B. Spanish landholders making alliances with the Americans
- C. Native American uprisings against the British
- D. The end of Britain's war with France and the freeing up of troops and resources

- _____ 4. What did rumor say was the purpose of the massing of British troops in the West Indies?

- A. An attack on Washington, D.C.
- B. An assault on New Orleans
- C. The end of the war with France
- D. An attempt to take Florida from Spain

5. Describe the force Jackson assembled at New Orleans.

6. What factors contributed to Jackson's frustration as he prepared his defenses at New Orleans?

Name _____



Date _____

- _____ 7. Jackson's surprise attack on the British camp had an invaluable result. What was it?
- A. The Spanish were so impressed by the daring raid that they deserted their British allies.
 - B. The attack pushed the British back into the sea-the threat to New Orleans was ended.
 - C. Many British soldiers were killed and the British attack force was significantly reduced.
 - D. The British decided to delay their attack on New Orleans, giving Jackson time to ready his defenses.
8. Analyze Jackson's preparations for the defense of New Orleans. Do you think he made good choices? Why or why not?

Love, faith, and compassion are also strong motivators. Which drives you most strongly? What might it prompt you to do?

Hatred has motivated many events in history. Describe one. What were the results of this type of motivation?
